

ST. LOUIS EMPACT PROJECTS

APRIL 2000

Community Based Environmental Protection

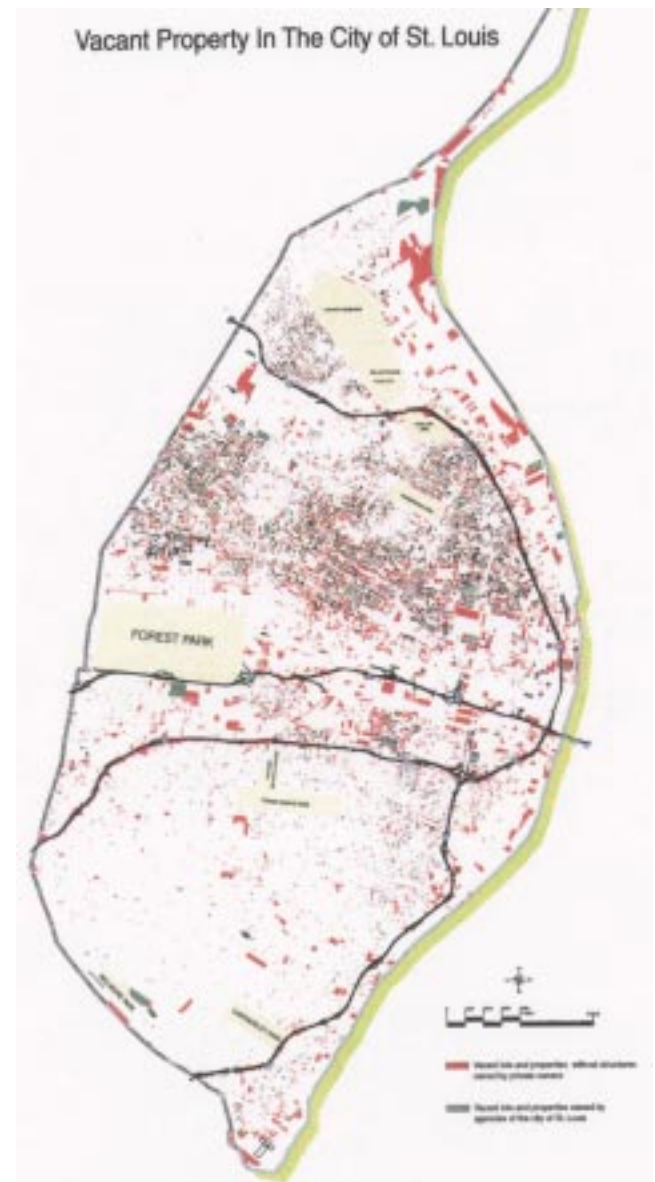
CBEP is an innovative approach taken by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to aid in protecting human health and the environment. The intent of CBEP is to bring people who live or work in a community together to (1) identify environmental concerns at the neighborhood level; (2) establish priorities among the various participants and governmental agencies; and (3) assist residents and partners in resolving environmental issues that will improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods.

BACKGROUND

In 1997, EPA announced a program entitled Environmental Monitoring for Public Access and Community Tracking, otherwise known as EMPACT. The goal of the EMPACT program is to assist communities in providing sustainable public access to environmental monitoring data and information that is clearly-communicated, time-relevant (timely or real-time), useful and accurate. The EMPACT program is applied in the largest 86 metropolitan areas in the United States and seeks to assist the American public in day-to-day decision-making about their health and the environment.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In 1998, EPA Region's 5 & 7 issued a grant to the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council (EWGWCC) to initiate the EMPACT process in the St. Louis metropolitan area. EWGWCC is a local area planning organization supported by local governments that has been active for more than 30 years in environmental planning and problem-solving, with a primary focus on air and water quality and energy issues associated with transportation. Although some information was available to



KEY

- Vacant lots and properties without structures owned by private owners
- Vacant lots and properties owned by agencies of the City of St. Louis

identify environmental issues of most significance to the St. Louis community, little was known about which particular aspect of these or other issues most concern residents, what kinds of information they would like to have about these issues, or from what media they most prefer to receive information. The initial St. Louis EMPACT project focused on these issues.

During 1999, EWGWCC hired a local firm, Attitude Research Company (ARC), to develop a process to collect information from the St. Louis community on the level of concern about environmental issues and to determine the best ways to communicate information concerning these issues to community members. During the Spring and Summer of 1999, ARC conducted an extensive telephone survey of community members along with a series of focus groups, to answer these questions. As a result, the top five environmental issues mentioned by St. Louis community residents in order of importance were:

- Abandoned and run-down houses
- Air pollution
- Streets in bad condition
- Litter and trash
- Abandoned industrial sites

When residents were asked about methods to communicate information on environmental issues, newsletters, block-level meetings, and mention on the radio were considered to be most effective. Other methods that were considered likely to be successful included: information made available in churches and other religious organizations; presentations to local neighborhood groups; articles in the local newspapers; and a designated neighborhood resident who would communicate to others about new information. Most people felt that either an Internet home page or E-mail newsletters would not be as effective in communicating with them.

In the spring of 1999, East-West Gateway Coordinating Council submitted a proposal for a Metro Area EMPACT Grant that would take advantage of the findings of the ARC Study. The proposal would link existing environmental data related to vacant properties utilizing Geographic Information System (GIS) tools.

The data layers would be imposed on digital orthographic quadrangle maps and would be made available to the public via the Internet as well as via local com-

munications media. The proposal also included a component known as “lead-safe yards” wherein soils would be analyzed in yards surrounding existing homes where lead based paint residues are suspected in St. Louis and East St. Louis.

The data would be reported to the home owner and would also be recorded in a GIS data layer similarly accessible via the Internet. The homeowners would be provided with guidance (and possibly landscaping assistance) in remediating any soils in their yards containing unsafe lead levels. In April 2000, a grant was awarded to EWGWCC to conduct the proposed work.

PARTICIPANTS

The primary participants in these projects are EPA’s Office of Research and Development, EPA Region’s 5 & 7, East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, St. Louis Development Corporation and Attitude Research Company of St. Louis.

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